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## **KHPA seeks help for those applying for federally funded medical benefits**

*The following is a column by Connie Hubbell, chair of the Kansas Health Policy Authority Board:*

As the chair of the Kansas Health Policy Authority Board, I take very seriously our commitment to Kansans, delivering accessible and quality health care.

Unfortunately, federal guidelines have imposed additional red tape, threatening the accessibility of health care for Kansans. On July 1, 2006, new federal citizenship requirements went into effect, requiring that all Medicaid applicants provide adequate documentation of citizenship and identification.

This new requirement has posed noteworthy obstacles to applicants and has overloaded the state's enrolment process, leading to significant declines in the number of beneficiaries. Applicants must now invest more time, effort and money to track down documents that may include passports, birth certificates, and picture IDs. The Medicaid enrolment process has been flooded with paper, faxes, mail, phone calls, and voice mail, and application review times have increased. The result is a backlog and a decline of approximately 18,000-20,000 beneficiaries, comprised predominantly of children and young families, and including many who will ultimately succeed in demonstrating their citizenship and eligibility.

While KHPA understands the purpose of the new law, we must point out that the impact of the law in our state is falling unfairly on eligible Kansans. We are particularly concerned about the impact on unsuccessful or delayed applicants who may have difficulty accessing health care services, and the impact on providers who will ultimately bear many of the costs for those who are uninsured as a result of the law.

We do not want any Kansans to lose health coverage. Thus, I am sending a letter to our Kansas Congressional delegation encouraging their review of this legislation to mitigate its impact on eligible citizens and state administrative operations and offering our assistance in determining policy alternatives.

Finally, I encourage all Kansas Medicaid applicants and current beneficiaries to provide all needed documentation at the time of application or review. This will assist us in the process and make sure you get the health services you need in a timely manner. By being prepared, it can reduce the amount of time it currently takes for an eligibility determination to be finalized and help Kansans get the care they need sooner.

Above all else, I, along with the staff of KHPA, am committed to the health of Kansans and ensuring they have access to quality care. We will continue to seek ways to provide the care you need.

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